1926 Fire Season
Koniksu National Forest

Diary of I. V. Anderson
Copied April 1972 with comments

I came to the Kaniksu National Forest in May of 1926 from California. I had been assistant to Cary Hill in the Division of Forest Products. Headquarters of the California National Forest Region were in the Ferry building and under supervision of Regional Forester Paul Redington. It only took me about a year to get a belly full of California. At my request and at my own expense, I was transferred to Newport as Assistant Forest Supervisor on the Kaniksu. I barely had time to locate a furnished house for the magnificent rental of $27.50 per month when the fire season broke.

A dry lightning storm of July 6 was the beginner. It set 72 fires. About 15 of these were in the Lamb, Kalispell and Granite Creek drainages of Jim Ward's ranger district then known as the Coolin River District. They were well dispersed over the area and were all controlled by July 11 without any big drain on fire suppression forces. My diary which is included in this write-up gives a running account of my activities as a fire boss from July 7 to August 18 when the rains came.

On July 12 we were congratulating ourselves that all fires were under control when the main lightning storm came along. The record shows that Jim Ward's Coolin District got 60 fires. A series of dry lightning clouds passed over the area from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. on July 12. Those fires originating from strikes in late afternoon smoked up the country making later strikes difficult to identify. One of the lookouts lost track of his count of strikes, he told me.

The Chief Forester's annual report for 1926 says this of the Kaniksu fires. "Of all the fires started (by the storm of July 12) only 32 failed to be brought under control by July 18. Aided by a week of 'fire weather' -- that is days of exceptionally low himidity and high winds which on July 18 developed into a gale -- these relatively few unsubdued fires became conflagrations. The fight against them necessitated the largest concentrated organization and supply of men, subsistence,

tools, and motor-truck and pack train transportation ever thrown into a single field by the Forest Service.

"At the maximum, more than 1400 men were employed. Forty officers were drawn from other forests and 100 separate camps were established first and last. When the rains came on August 17 & 18, a total of more than 500 miles of fire trench had been built." Burned-over acreage totalled 154,000 acres. With the exception of 1/2 mile between Lamb Creek and Kalispell Creek there was an unbroken fire line for a distance of over 60 miles northward to the Canadian boundary. This was an epochal fire. No wonder it stands as one of the most memorable milestones of my career as a Forester.

Wednesday, July 7, 1926

At Bismarck Ranger Station lined up Kenyon for making quarters for men at station. To Luby Bay with car. Met 2 men from road camp 3 or 4 miles up from Lamb Creek road. Took them to Luby Bay. They did not find fire in Section 10. Men from Luby Bay had not showed up yet. Back up Lamb Creek to upper camp 10. Back to Ranger Station. Went north to camp 10, could not see smoke. Went off last pole road next to West Branch road. Had Strong and 1 man help me back on road. Apparently no damage to car. Garrison and Day showed up while we were working on car. Had not found fire. Back to Luby Bay with them. To Falls Ranger Station with car that night.

Time 12 hours.

8 hours Act. 100, Sec. 10 Lamb Creek fire

4 hours Act. 100, Sect 31 Fire just up shore from Luby Bay

Thursday, July 8, 1926

At Falls Ranger Station. Went over Imp. work with Murray. Drove to Experiment Station. Went over fire situation with McKinnon. Drove to Coolin. Had dinner. At 6:35 p.m. went to Baritoe Island with Ward to reported fire. Could not find it.

Returned at 8:45 p.m.

Time 10 hours

6 hours Act 1

4 hours Act 100 Misc. fires.

Friday, July 9

Left Coolin at 12:30 p.m. for Newport; stopped at Experiment Station on way down. Lined up McGregor on Ranger Station maintenance, etc. Told him not to plan on cutting off end of house and moving it to be used for office. Took Gisborne to Priest River. Had supper there. Proceeded on to Newport. Arrived at 7:00 p.m.

Time 10 hours Act 1

Saturday, July 10

In Newport. Hired emergency men and on fire desk. Sent 1 man to Ward and 2 men to Redding, also 225 ft. rope to Bismark. Left Newport 10:00 p.m. for Bismark. Picked up tools at Falls Ranger station. Arrived Bismark at 1:30 a.m.

Time 17 hours Act 09 Presuppression

Sunday, July 11

Left Bismark at 4:00 a.m. with 18 men from road camp and Vincent in charge. Arrived at fire 9:00 a.m. "Hit her." Crowned at 1:30 p.m. just as we were about to connect trench. Caught some up again before night. Decided with additional men could get her tomorrow. Told Kenyon (Kenyon was a cow poke and horse wrangler from the White Sulphur Springs country in Montana.) to put in call for 15 more men and 25 man outfit. Bad wind at 1:30 variable

Time 14 hours.

Monday, July 12

On Fire #95. "Hit her" at 5:00 a.m. Gisborne (Harry Gisborne was in charge of fire research at the Northern Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station) came in with 19 more men. Fire held through windy afternoon. Looks like it's corralled. Talked with Bealey (Bealey was the Assistant Ranger and Fire Dispatcher for the Coolin Ranger District; Jim Ward was the District Ranger) at 6:00 p.m. Tiedt (Tiedt was a fireman from Vincent's road crew) discovered 2 more fires at 3:30 p.m. after lightning storm on South Fork Granite. (This was the beginning of a literal bath of lightning fires) Tiedt and 6 men hitting them early tomorrow. Seven fires reported by Bealey to me in Tillicum Creek and northward. Hitting them tomorrow morning with 6 men. Bealey said Ostermeyer, Wallace and Eaton were lined up for fires in Sections 34 & 20, T 38, R 45. Went down to Forks. Arrived 11:30 p.m. wet. Worst lightning storm I was ever in. Talked with Kenyon and Breen. Told them would send 8 men coming in from brush crew and 4 or 5 more men from camp in 34 to Ward.

Time 18 hours

12 hours Fire 95

6 hours Willow Creek #1

Tuesday, July 13

At forks of Granite. Two men came in at 5:00 a.m. from 8-man brush crew sent in last night. Gisborne came in at 6:00 a.m. Told him to send 3 men and cook from Tiedt fire to Ward. Tiedt took 6 men and mule and tools and grub up South Fork Granite. I lined out Ostermeyer and Clem. Ostermeyer and Eaton to take Sec. 34, T38N. R45W fire and Clem Wallace Section 20 fire in same town. Took 6 men for myself from Tiedt camp on 34. Lined Gisborne up on action for fire near Blacktail and one near camp. Left at 8:00 a.m. for Tillicum Creek with 6 men. Poor men, too;

no hobs or calks. Left them at 3:30 p.m. and told them to go down into creek just above forks and pitch camp for night. Went on to fires. Looked over Section 6 fire 4:30 p.m., crowning badly. 5:00 p.m. arrived Section 32 fire. Too much smoke to even estimate area. Would guess around 50 acres. Spotted out trail and camp location. To creek and camped for night at 8:00 p.m.

Time 15 hours Fire Section 32 T38N R45W

Wednesday, July 14

Went up creek and got 6 men I had directed to camp above Forks. Arrived there 6:00 a.m. Took them back down creek and started them on trail work. Went up and located lines between 3 and 4 and 2 and 3 T37-R45. Fires in sections 32 and 34 have joined. Bad situation. Back down to camp at 12 noon. Sent one man down first thing this morning for grub. Took Smokechaser outfit down to Forks. Talked with Bealey and Whitham (Kaniksu Forest Supervisor). Whitham told me impossible to get action on fire until more equipment and stock available. Told him I'd line out camps and wait. Foltz coming in tomorrow. Did not meet man I sent in for grub on trail. Strung balance of outpost wire connecting Stagger Inn. Jim Ward arrived 10:20 p.m. Showed me note from Ed Long. Long said Breen pulled 35 man Harp crew at noon. Fire went to hell this afternoon. Only 6 men on fire in Section 13

Time 15 hours Willow Creek Fire #1

Thursday, July 15

Ostermeyer to fire in head of Athol Creek. Took smokechaser pack, headed to see what Willow Creek #1 fire was doing on NE and fire in Section 20. Met 4 men on trail coming out from Tillicum Creek at 11:00 a.m. Gave 2 of them time. Told others to check up at Fords and go back to camp and fix up trail into Tillicum Creek. Up to Stagger Inn. Met Wallace there. Said he found no fire in Section 20 but 30 acre one in 22 T38-R45. Burning in sp. and balsam. Fire from Section 7 on Pauley's (Art Pauley

was the District Ranger on the other side of the mountain at Ione, Washington) side looked as though it was coming over on this side. Back down to Forks with Wallace. Saw my men foot of Tillicum Creek Trail. Gave further orders for trail construction and told them pack string would be in tomorrow. Back to Forks. Ostermeyer returned from Athol Creek fire. Said he had it about out and safe. At 12:00 m. (midnight) talked with Tiedt about man who had broken legs in South Fork, Granite Creek, 9:00 p.m. Tiedt and two men arrived with injured man. He was about all in and both legs apparently broken. Made litter and packed him to foot of trail, at Teepee Springs. On to Bismark. Arrived 4:30 a.m.

Time 24 hours Granite Creek fires and Willow Creek #2

Friday, July 16

Got 2 hours shut eye in a.m., shaved and took a cold bath, felt 10 years younger (I was 28 at the time). Heard from Priest River that Bogart has broken both legs. Talked with Whitham at Newport and gave him dope on Granite Creek situation. Told him at least 100 men were required to even check fire. Said no men available but they would be sent out as soon as possible. Hager Mountain fire burning up in good shape. Talked over general situation with Jack Baron and Breen. Baron said government had a big resource at stake in Kalispell Creek. Decided to hit fires in lower country until men were available for fires in back country. Crew were working Hager Mountain (Hager Mountain was later renamed Wabaningo Mountain after an Ottowa Indian Chief) fire from Bismark Ranger Station. Had considerable argument regarding placing of camp 4 miles down road. Finally decided to do so. Breen fire broke loose. Baron took outfit I had planned on for Granite Creek to Kalispell Creek. Saw Phil Neff who was handling Lamb Creek fire. At 7:00 p.m. went down to Hager Mountain fire where Kenyon was working with 18 men. Went up over south side with Gillis. Back

to Bismark at midnight.

Time 16 hours

10 hours Tillicum Creek fire

6 hours Hager Mountain fire

Saturday, July 17

At Bismark made up grub order to go to Forks with pack string. Gave orders for packer to proceed to Tiedt fire #1 and bring back 25-man outfit to Forks. Left at 7:30 a.m. for Forks with cook and 1 flunky for Forks. Arrived at noon. Teed and 6 of his men who had been at Tyee camp were there as per my orders of the night before to move out because things were getting too hot. Three of the 4 men I left on Tillicum were also there. Said one man had stayed to watch camp. Put them to work on trail while Teed and I scouted situation on Tillicum Creek. Back to camp at 7:00 p.m. Decided it was a folly to place men on Tillicum which was directly in the path of the big fire. Fire had burned down about ½ way in Section 3. Could not as yet see any fire in bottom further up Tillicum. Packer back from Tiedt fire #1 camp at 7:30 p.m. Talked over whole situation with Breen and Ward and told them what I figured fire would do. Tried to get more men; none available. She looks bad.

Time 14 hours Tillicum Creek Fire

Sunday, July 18

At Forks Granite. Told packer to await further orders until Teed and I had scouted out fire in South Fork Granite. Put 9 men to work cutting out old trail on ridge between South Fork Granite and Tillicum. Asked Breen about more men. Said none available as fires in lower country were getting worse. Up South Fork Granite with Teed. Fire appeared to have burned out entire upper end of creek northward from

Sema Creek. At 12 midnight fire had burned diagonally across Section 22 and up in 15 and heading northward, how far we could not determine. Saw spot fires in Tobasco and Sema Creek, probably from Hungry Creek fire which was boiling up strong. Mush Creek fire also equally as wicked. Fear entire South Fork will be afire by tomorrow night. Back to Forks at 1:00 p.m. Teed ordered to report at Hungry Creek fire on Kalispell Creek. Gave Breen lineup on situation. Am positive fire now has 5 mile front. Decided folly to move camp into South Fork with only 9 men available. Doubt very much if fire is within control of human power.

Went up North Fork after supper with Wallace. Fire makes a grand sight. Can now see a solid line of fire for at least a township and a half. Fire is no doubt already to Ancient Grove of Cedars. Also burning and crowning badly in Lower Tillicum flats. Roar of fire and crashing of falling trees easily heard for 5 miles.

Heard over phone Noordman post office had burned out and crew were fighting to save Bismark Ranger Station. Wonder how much longer it will be safe here.

Time 12 hours LeClerk Creek fire

11:00 p.m. Just looked out cabin door. Entire N.W. horizon is a livid reflection of fire. Roaring of fire and crashing of timber heard as if next door.

Monday, July 19

At Forks Granite. Ostermeyer left at 3:00 a.m. for Packer Creek camp to watch layout for Foltz while he looked over Blacktail fire. Sent Clem up to get men at Section 34. Went up to Stagger Inn camp with Eaton to get his stuff. Fire still threatening creek bottom so did not want him to go up alone. Fire had apparently crossed the mouth of Tillicum Creek and burned off slopes next to Creek on Sections 12-11-14 T37N.R45 and Section 35 in T38. Had spotted across creek between Huff Lake trail and cedars. Had apparently gone up mountain considerable distance. Called Breen from (Stagger) Inn. Said no chance of getting men yet. Back to Forks by 10:30 p.m.

Made out timeslips for 14 men and started them to Blacktail Fire where they were badly needed.

Clem said fire had crossed Creek on South Fork just below mountain meadow and was endangering section 34 camp so we had better move it.

Time 12 hours

6 hours Tillicum Creek fire

6 hours Le Clerc Creek fire

Tuesday, July 20

At Forks Granite. Sent Easton down to look at fires in Section 27 (62-5) and Section 33 (62-5). Reported tonight Section 33 fire was out and Section 27 fire smoldering in only a few spots. Ostermeyer returned from Packer Creek fire at 10:00 a.m. Ryan, Clem and I moved out remainder of Section 34 camp today. Lucky we have a quiet day or things might get hot. Took out 2 horse loads and 3 more counting ourselves. Made 2 trips. Still 2 horse loads left. Fire that jumped creek in Section 23 rather quiet all day. Wish I could get men; I could get her now. From appearances to the Northward most of Cache Creek is now burned out. Still some hot places to the northward toward head of Tillicum. Tillicum must be at least partially burned out by this time. Ostermeyer said Blacktail Mountain fire went strong today.

Time 13 hours Hungry Creek fire.

Wednesday, July 21

(Eleven days since fires started.) At Forks Granite. Sent Ostermeyer and Ryan to Tiedt fire for balance of stuff. Checked over 25 man outfits and went over bed rolls "cargoing" for pack string which arrived 11:00 a.m. Foggy and cold this a.m. Fires quiet. Left cook at Forks for further orders. Left for B.R.S. at 1:30 p.m. Visited Watson camp en route. Also trail fire which was out. Arrived B.R.S. at 5:00 p.m.

Talked situation over with Barron who wanted me to go into Kalispell Creek with him. Breen wanted me to go to Hager Mountain fire, but I figured I was needed more on Kalispell Creek so other arrangements were made. Gave Clem lineup for reworking 10 and 6 men outfits.

Time 14 hours

7 hours Watson Mountain Fire

7 hours Kalispell Creek #2

Thursday, July 22

At Bismark Ranger Station. Wrote letter to Lucile (my wife). Talked with Breen about Kalispell Creek situation. Said Block Mill men from Diamond Match Co. would be released from Quartz Creek Friday night. Left 7:00 a.m. for Kalispell Creek with Jack Baron, Pat Jackson, Chris Lucken and Geo. Gillis. Lucken to Bath Creek; Barron and Jackson to Hungry Creek and Gillis and myself to Kalispell Fire #2. Fire burning up in Section 1, T36.45. Followed around entire north side of fire to Frog Lake. Located S.W. corner of 1 and run west on same 12 tallies. On way to Blacktail trail camp discovered fire in head draw in SW 4 of 11. Arrived trail camp at 5:00 p.m. Made fol. lineup with Breen in evening. Ten men and outfits into Bath Creek tomorrow with Lucken. Ten men to trail camp under Gillis. Fifty men and outfit to Section 23 for Kalispell #1 fire under Jackson and Baron. Five men to precede string to cut out trail to camp. Twenty-five men and outfit for Section 13 as soon as possible. Said Hannah fire on Lamb Creek in fair shape.

Time 12 hours Kalispell #2 fire

Fires quiet today. Foggy and cold this a.m. Felt one drop of rain today.

Friday, July 23

Foggy (smoke) and cold this a.m. Baron and Jackson down to Section 23 to blaze

out trail to new camp. Gillis to stay at Blacktail until men arrive. Went east along South line of Kalispell fire #2. Burning briskly in draws and slowly on ridges and points. Creeping down draws fastest. Just about to limit of merchantability in places. Bad place in NE corner of Section 15. At 12:00 noon noticed fire burning strong in Section 17 a mile beyond main fire. Struck cross country to Meadow Mountain trail. Located proposed camp in Section 18 on site of old fire camp near trappers cabin. About an hour or two of brisk wind from 1:00 till 3:00 p.m. Located ¼ cor. between 17 and 18 (61-5). Back to Baron camp. Made following arrangements with Breen and Bismark Ranger Station -- 45 Diamond Match mill men to camp 1 -- 15 to Gillis, 25 to Camp 1 and 10 to Chris Lucken on Bath Creek. Pack train to follow all crews.

Time 14 hours Kalispell #2 fire

Saturday, July 24

At Camp 1. Very smoky and cold in early a.m. Went down to meet men and pack train going to Camp 1. Scouted out old fire trail into SW 4 of 12. Too kinky and full of windfalls to use. Furthermore Section 12 is not proper location for camp. Went on to Section 18 camp site. Blazed trail to fire about 10 chs. distant. Went around about ½ mile of it. Then back to camp. Men had just arrived--12:15 p.m. Started them on fire immediately. Pack train arrived 1:00 p.m. Cook not in yet. Went up wrong trail. He arrived at 2:00 p.m. Told timekeeper to go out and get men to come in for lunch. Lunch, then back to fire. Damn poor outfit we got--no salt, no butter, no nothing but a lot of grubshoes. Worked men till 6:00. Headed for camp 1 at 5:00 p.m. Met Kourtland and 22 men at forks of trail. Split them 11 to Camp 1 and 11 to Camp 2. Met Chris Lucken on trail. Said fires in Section 35 had joined main Hungry Creek fire. Arrived camp 6:45 p.m. Met (John R.) Gray, Manager of Diamond Match Co. and

previous. Lined up cargo for Camp 2. Tried to find out from Coolin where my mail was. No luck. Back to Camp 2. Helped timekeeper string telephone wire 2½ miles to Camp 2. He had it in one "H" of a mess. Clem Wallace brought phone over at noon. Sent him over to look over Lower Bath Creek fire at 1:00 p.m. Out on line with crew at Camp 2. Went to Camp 1 after supper. Clem showed up after supper. Told him to go back to Chris early in morning, and have Chris pull his camp back to Section 31. At Camp 1 all night.

Time 14 hours Kalispell #2 fire

Tuesday, July 27

Not so cold last night. Look for a bad day. At Camp 1. Made following lineup. Pack train to move 25 man outfits to Camp 3 on Section 28 and Section 31 on Lower Bath. Chris to pull his camp back down to Section 31 and catch fire coming in from Lamb Creek before it cuts off Bath Creek drainage. Went up with Barron to look over fire in upper end of Kalispell. Jack quit me in Section 21. Looked over situation in Section 16. About ½ of section burned over. Burning slowly. Not joined with Hungry Creek fire yet. Hit Kalispell trail and proceeded to Kalispell Rock. Saw 3 men from Sutton's camp. Said his camp was on Divide trail 1 mile north of Kalispell Rock. Also one (fire camp) 3 miles south on Divide trail at head of Squaw Valley. Back to Blacktail camp. Talked with Jack over phone. On to Camp 1 for night.

(By July 27 routine at the first fire camps established had settled down to a routine of 14 hours per day for the day crew and 10 hours for night patrol. After my experience of 1926 I was convinced night patrol of the fire line was senseless in all but most unusual situations.

Fire Camp 1 on Hungry Creek had a good cook and I stopped there the night of the 27th. It was common practice for the day crew to jungle up around a small

camp fire for an hour or so before turning in. With my final cup of coffee in hand, I sat down on a log just out of range of the glow of the camp fire. The strains of one of the most popular songs of the day, "The Prisoner Song," drifted on the cool evening breeze. It was being sung almost in solo by a soft and melodious tenor voice. "With the cold prison bars all around me and my head on a pillow of stone." It was a rather soothing experience after the hectic days since July 12. The next morning I inquired as to the identity of the singer. "Oh, that's Tommy Slater, a Canadian lumberjack from B.C. Comes down here every year--overstays his leave until U.S. Customs catches up with him and sends him back. He's one of the best all around lumber jacks in the Northwest. Can't be beat as an axeman." Then with raised eyebrows, "Was his punk singing, too?" So that beautiful tenor voice I had listened to with so much pleasure last night was a homosexual besides probably being in the U.S. illegally. However, I didn't wrestle with my conscience very long before I decided -- we needed fire fighters, didn't we? Tommy was worth 4 or 5 of some of the bundle stiffs we had been getting.

I promptly forgot the whole thing until 3 fire seasons (1929) later. I was on the Squaw Creek fire on the breaks of the River of No Return, the Salmon River. Our fire camps were 3 sleeps from Darby, Montana. I was at the Forks of the Harrington Ridge trail and the trail leading down to Frank Lance's place (Lance's Bar) on the Salmon River. Fifty fire fighters had arrived and 25 were consigned to Lance's Bar on the river and 25 to the Harrington Ridge camp. So I told them to start walking and every other man go down the right hand trail, the rest the left hand. It was then I heard that tenor voice coming out of the past. It was Tommy Slater. Only this time his punk was at his elbow as both broke out of the line and came over to me. I didn't know that he knew me, but he mentioned having fought fire for me in 1926. Then he said, "Me and this kid has been together a long time. I've showed him a lot of things. He's a good sawyer and a better axeman then me. Can't we both

go left?" They both went left.)

Following lineup for tommorrow: Jack to take 15 men from Camp 1 for Camp 3; Blacktail Camp to get 10 of the new men and Camp 3 - 10. Talked over situation with Coolin (Coolin was the Ranger District Headquarters) and tried to find out where in "H" my mail is. No airplane report available. Last one 3 days old.

Time 14 hours

8 hours Hungry Creek Fire

6 hours Kalispell #2

Wednesday, July 28

At Camp 1. Down over trench toward Bath Creek. Had Jackson line up patrolmen to dig out fire near edge of trail rather than cover. Struck hot spot for about 100 yards where fire had gotten away. Went around upper end of fire where Chris had 5 men working. Burning down hill slowly. Down Bath Creek to Section 31 camp. Looked over 2 fires Chris was working on. Needs more men. Told him would get 20 men as soon as possible. On to Bismark. Arrived 7:00 p.m. Got hold of Coolin and made arrangements for plane flight.

Time 14 hours Hungry Creek fire

Thursday, July 29

At Bismark. Made up map for observation from plane. Left Bismark at 11:00 a.m. with Dodge for Blue Creek. Had blow-out and road blockade en route. Got into landing field at 2:30 p.m. Took off 10 minutes later. (The plane we used was a DeHaviland of World War I vintage. The pilot was up front and the observer directly behind him and right in line for 90% of the exhaust fumes. A bad location for a queasy stomach. We always carried paper sacks in the cockpit.) Up 2 hours. Took in hanna fire, Squaw Valley, Lamb Creek, Kalispell and Granite. Smoke so dense on Granite

could see nothing. Burning hard in Sections 21 and 16 on Kalispel. Went to Divide in 20. Back to landing. Took injured man on into Priest River. Six p.m. supper at Priest River. On to Newport. Met Sherman, Kircher, Morrell and Stockdale. (Sherman was the Associate Forester, Washington D.C. and Kircher was an Assistant Forester. Morrel was the Regional Forester from Missoula and Stockdale his Assistant. Col Greeley was Chief Forester at this time.) Talked over situation with Whitham. Also mentioned friction at Coolin. Home for night at 10:00 p.m.

Time 14 hours Hungry Creek fire.

(When I came to the Kaniksu the spring of 1926, it was evident Supervisor Whitham was having administrative difficulties. These became much more apparent during such a crisis as we were now experiencing. One shortcoming most apparent was his tendency to vacillate in the face of the least opposition from his District Rangers. He was also very careless in the use of government vehicles, boats and horses for personal recreation. Conditions that developed during such a forest fire crisis as the Kaniksu had never before been experienced, and were beyond his capacity as an administrator. Grossly undermanned and entirely lacking equipment for the colossal fire control job at hand, no Forest Supervisor of that day could have done much better than Whitham did. He was a nervous wreck at the end of the fire season. All through the following year his administrative problems grew.

In November, 1927, I was transferred to the Regional Forester's office as a Staff assistant in the Division of Forest Products. I hardly had time to acquaint myself with the new job before Regional Forester Morrell called me to his office. He said things were going badly on the Kaniksu and wanted to know if I could tell him what was wrong. Some of the staff had demanded a change. I told him there were always two sides to such situations and I was sure Whitham had his side and that I would rather not discuss the matter unless "Whit" was there to present his side. Whitham was summoned and I felt sorry for him. He sure looked as though

he had gone through the mill since I last saw him. Mr. Morrell presented the charges made by the staff and subsequent inspections of the 1926 fires and activities of 1927. There was little I could say in "Whit's" defense. He left Missoula a pathetic figure. A day or so later he suffered a nervous breakdown and was taken to the hospital in Spokane in a strait jacket. He recovered and after a few months was assigned to one of the Eastern Montana forests. I always had a feeling that "Whit" felt I was responsible for his dismissal from the Kaniksu to a far greater degree than I actually was.)

Friday, July 30

At Newport. Made arrangements with Service Garage for car repair. Wife drove W. W. White and I to Coolin in my car. Left Newport 10:30 a.m. Took boat with During (Dunn) and White to Reeder Creek. Hanna fire going strong and menacing Schneider's Beach and Luby Bay on Priest Lake. Took out phone at Reeder Creek and cached it in tool cache. Hoofed to Bismark. Arrived 6:00 p.m. Talked with Jack Barron about Kalispell fire. Said trench was connected on north side today. Bad day in Section 21. New spot fire in 23.

Time 12 hours Kalispell #2 fire

Saturday, July 31

At Bismark Ranger Station. Made arrangements for Dunn to take charge of Kalispell #2 Camp. Talked with Barron. Left 7:00 a.m. with Dunn for Bath Creek. Took saddle horse and pack horse to camp. Looked over fire in Section 6 with Chris. Chris was under misunderstanding that Barron was going to let his cook go. Told him I would straighten it out. Lined him up to put 8 men on Section 6 fire and balance on 25. Also to install phone. Went on to Camp 3 after supper. Jack said Chris was mistaken about cook racket. Planned to send Pat Jackson back to Camp 1 as no one seemed to be in full charge. Men in camp quite panicky at 2:00 a.m. because fire was putting

up glare. Started pump and had to stop them.

Time 16 hours Hungry Creek fire

Sunday, August 1

Pat Jackson took 8 men to Camp 1. Jack and I went down over line to where he proposed back fire. Seemed needless to me. Met George Gillis crew in Section 16 trenching to creek. Had dinner at Blacktail camp. Went over fire in Section 10. Burning within 1 tally (a tally is 5 chains or 330 feet) of ¼ corner between 10 and 15. Went over line in 11. Quite dead, back to camp at 5:00 p.m. Over to Section 21 where Jack had proposed back fire. Agree to fire only a portion of it. Burned well on ridge but could not make it burn in bottom. To Camp 3 at 1:00 a.m.

Time 21 hours Hungry Creek fire.

Monday, August 2

Up at 6:00 a.m. Went down to Camp 1. Kitchen in "H" of a mess. Cook dirty. On to Bath Creek Camp. Chris to get 10 new men today and Larry 6 men scarce. Went out over trench without Chris. Breen preceded me by 20 minutes. Did not see him. Crew working entirely too far away from fire. Turned them up to work next to fire. Over to Jackson's crew. Told him he must keep crew up next to fire especially on such a quiet day. Back to Chris crew. Expect to hook up tomorrow. Talked with Jim Ward. Told him to come up tomorrow.

Time 12 hours Hungry Creek fire.

Tuesday, August 3

At Bath Creek Camp. Told timekeeper to tell Jim I would be on fire line when he came. Went up and lined out crew. Got 'em to string out instead of bunching. Put trench through to old fire trail at noon. Didn't dare back fire unburned area.

me tonight he was ¼ mile down other side on Lamb Creek. Up on line all day with Teed and crew. Slop-over in jungle burned considerable last night. Will take crew until some time tomorrow to corral it. Burned out inside of trench this afternoon this side of Boo Boo. Worked fine. One spot fire. Told men to watch it closely. Time 14 hours Hungry Creek fire.

Friday, August 6

At Bath Creek. Went over lineup with Teed. Took Pat Noblet to Camp 1 as patrol forman. Sent Tom Kerr back to Bath Creek to scout out and watch Hannah fire. Lined up Noblet at Camp 1. Told him to gather all extra tools and beds and clean up camp. Also mop up all live fire 75 yards inside fire line. On to Camp 3. Talked over situation with Barron in presence of Lucken who took camp over. Went out over line with Chris. Slop-over on point where no back fire should have been set occurred yesterday. Line still hot ¼ mile behind this. Instructed Chris to clean up all live fire 75 yards back of fire line. Also clean out creek bottom below and above Hungry Creek. On to Blacktail camp. Went out over line after supper with Gillis. Everything quite cool. Gave him same instructions as Lucken. Instructed Breen to send all extra men (11) at Bismark to Bath Creek. Awful odor around camp. Told Gillis to lime slop holes and cover well and dig new one. Also not to allow cook to throw dishwater around camp.

Time 16 hours Hungry Creek fire.

Condemned 4 cross cut saws: 1 burned at Camp 3, 1 at Bath Creek, 1 broken at Camp 1 and 1 at Blacktail.

Saturday, August 7

At Blacktail camp. Gave Gillis lineup for putting camp on patrol basis. Sent 1 day man and 5 night men down to Bath Creek. Four quit whom I had planned on sending

Patterson as straw boss, as he had been on that line the day previous. Went on to Camp 1. Met Pat Noblet. Told him to can 2 men from Camp 1 crew. On to Camp 1. Met De Groat. Lined up equipment and grub to be sent out with pack string tomorrow. On to Camp 3. Thence to Blacktail camp. Sanitary conditions much improved over 3 days ago. Told Mercer to fire cook. Went over upper line after supper with De Groat and Mercer. Lined them up on hot spotting etc. Back to Camp 3 at 7:30. Told Breen I had 12 pack loads to go out tomorrow.

Time 15 hours Hungry Creek fire.

Tuesday, August 10

At Camp 3. Went over line below Camp 3 in creek bottom with De Groat. Decided to cut snags and burn strip to creek bottom. Went on down creek. Looked over spot fire near camp 1. Perfectly dead. Went over flats north side of creek looking for spot fires and getting a view of fire. Everything looking good. To Bath Creek camp 11:00 a.m. Sent flunky up to Blacktail as cook. Sent timekeeper up to Camp 3 for lanterns and files. On to Bismark. There for the night. Talked with Bealey about situation around Stagger Inn. Said Whitham was very anxious to build up camp to 50 men.

Time 14 hours Hungry Creek fire.

Wednesday, August 11

Condemned 1 cross cut saw and 1 stove 2 weeks ago at Forks of Granite for Ward. At Bismark Ranger Station. Lined out day for Kalispell Basin. Two men quit at Blacktail. Lined up men sharpening axes, mattocks, etc. Cleaned up and put equipment in order. No men for release at Bath Creek for a couple of days. Decided to clean out bed 1919 trench in Section 1 and back fire if necessary. Talked with De Groat in evening. Everything OK at Camp 3, 1 and Blacktail. Says can pull

Camp 1 in a few more days. Timekeeper at Bath Creek seriously ill with ptomaine poisoning. Called doctor at Priest River about it.

Time 15 hours Hungry Creek fire

Thursday, August 12

At Bismark Ranger Station, Lining out cargoes. Cleaned up week's records, very disorderly. Lined up blacksmith on tool repair. Kenyon received message that his mother was very ill. Teed reported timekeeper resting easy in a.m. and would be OK by evening. De Groat said small spot fire in Section 15 broke out but only burned over 250 square feet before they caught it. Whitham arrived 7:00 p.m. Talked over Kalispell situation with him.

Time 14 hours Act. 1

Friday, August 13

At Bismark Ranger Station. Lined up order for day. Whitham left for Granite Creek at 6:00 a.m. Teed discovered new spot fire from Hannah fire. Left orders for 25 man outfit (extra saws and wedges) to be cargoed for new camp--Last Chance Camp. Ordered 2 - 4" maps from Newport of Kalispell drainage. Left 10:30 a.m. for Kalispell Camp 2. Went over line with Larry. New camp site in Section 1 at edge of burn. Old camp site in Section 36 burned and too ashy for camp. Told Larry to omit trench on numerous spots now dead and start trench toward Athol Creek. On to South Fork Granite. Trail unburned 2 chs above old Teed fire camp and 5 chs below. Still quite hot spots above meadows. Inspected Camp 3. On to Forks. Saw Ward. In evening phoned lineup to Teed and De Groat. Teed has 36 men in camp. Has new spot from Hannah fire trenched. Twenty-five men to start from Bismark Ranger Station early in morning for Last Chance Camp.

Time 12 hours Act. 1

Saturday, August 14

At Forks, Granite. Left 6:00 a.m. for Stagger Inn. Met W. W. White at Stagger Inn camp at 10:00 a.m. Talked over situation. Lined him up on timekeeper. Said they had about 2 mile trench to build to get to Last Chance camp. Went up to Last Chance site with White, Garner and 1 straw boss. On to road camp in pass. Two men watching camp. Talked with Simpson who said Joe Holm was lined up to relieve Parker. Met Mace on trail to Grassy Top. Saw Parker in camp at 4:00 p.m. Packer was also there. Had been there since 1:00 p.m. Camp in awful sanitary condition. No trail into camp.

Time 12 hours Act. 1

Lined Parker up for timekeeper. Time in awful shape. Not posted for several days. Helped him fix them up.

Sunday, August 15

At Parker's camp. Lined up Parker. Ordered more tools for him from Monumental in p.m. Simpson said 15 men, 12 beds and tools were going in. Started 12 men working toward Last Chance camp. Instructed him to cold trail 1 mile south of camp. Left Parker 10:00 a.m. To Grassy Top and down trail to Bunch Grass. Fire all along trail with exception of 3/4 mile above juntion of Harvey Creek Bunch Grass trail. Sutton had camp about 1 mile south of Bunch Grass meadow. About 15 men at camp. Went to Monumental Lookout. Saw Bergman. Met Cunningham (Forester in charge of cooperative fire work at Missoula Regional headquarters) and Sutton in the evening. Cunningham said he was riding on lid to see that Ass'n. (Pend Oreille Timber Protective Association) did not back fire the whole country.

Time 14 hours Act. 1

Monday, August 16

At Monumental. Talked with Cunningham and Sutton regarding Harvey Creek situation. Went to Bunch Grass and thence down South Fork Granite at 8:00 a.m. Trail in awful shape to 1 mile beyond foot of hill. All wire burned beyond further use. Line with exception of ½ mile in repro. will need reconstruction. Arrived Camp 3 1:00 p.m. Had lunch. On to Forks Granite. Saw Ward and Favre in evening. Gave out lineup for Kalispell Creek. Released a few more men. Sent out 6 men, W. W. White had sent down from Stagger Inn without putting them to work. Assisted timekeeper straighten out awful mess of time slips.

Time 14 hours Act. 1

Tuesday, August 17

At Forks Granite camp. Undecided about moving Camp 3 to Section 36. Decided to wait until Ward and I had scouted out necessary trench to connect up with Kalispell Camp 2. Misting at 6:00 a.m., fair rain by 9:00 a.m. Rain off and on all day. Saw crew on line, also Superintendent Favre and straw boss from Forks. Told them we did not plan on moving camp. Dunn had only built 4 chs. of line on point of ridge. Remainder to flats worked over very poorly. Stopped at Kalispell camp 2 for dinner 2:00 p.m. Four men out on line. Told foreman not to send any men out in this weather, that we wanted most of line to top of hill trenched unless it rained at least 24 hours more. Told timekeeper to give men who were out on line actual time put in but no one would go out tomorrow if rain continued.

To Camp 2 patrol camp. Men also out. They were also out and would be entitled to time. Told them to move to Camp 2 tomorrow and leave two men to watch camp. On to Bismark with Ward. Arrived 6:00 p.m.

Time 14 hours Act 1

Talked over lineup with Teed, De Groat and Favre in evening. Teed to release 10 men tomorrow.

Wednesday, August 18

At Bismark Ranger Station. Rain all day. Lined up return shipment of equipment. Had blacksmith make telephone wire reel etc.

Time 12 hours Act 1

(This rain marked the beginning of the equinoxial storms and the end of a fire season that now seems but a dream to me. Forty-six years have passed. Many of the names and places mentioned in the preceding copy of my diary have left my memory.

Just to read of the ground I covered and the hours I put in maked me tired now at 74 years of age. At 28 years of age, I was in the prime of life, and I can truly say I enjoyed every day of this experience. The virgin forest and the more or less primitive methods we were forced to use in those days are gone. Foresters will never again encounter these conditions. We may have fires of similar or greater magnitude but the methods of fighting them will be different.

I have been asked many times, could the same number of lightning strikes result in such a large burned-over acreage today. My answer is, "I don't know." The only test would be a similar deluge of lightning strikes after the cumulative effect of 11 dry years in succesion. So far to this day, 1971, such a combination of conditions has not existed.

Many of the lightning strikes of July 12, 1926, lit running -- 10 minutes after the strike flames were in the tree crowns. Most of the lightning strikes in the Kalispell Granite Creek drainages occured from 3:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m. The night was warm and windy so the fires burned all night and by the next morning many of them were 100 acres in size or more. Both drainages were smoke filled so smoke jumpers and helicopter crews would have had a difficult time finding landing

spots. Flying conditions the afternoon and evening of July 12 were bad because of air turbulence. I doubt if a striking force of any size could have been airborne into the area until some time the following day. A fleet of fire retardent bombers might have saved the day. This, followed up by 500 fire fighters, might have held the burned over acreage to half of the final acreage.

However, none of the fires in the Granite Creek, Kalispell Creek drainages made any spectacular runs until July 18. Had we have been adequately manned and had the fire retardent bombers of today, we might have had the fires contained to a degree they would have not responded to blow-up conditions on July 18.

I was on the head end of the Pete King McLendon Butte "blow-up" on the Locksa Fork of the Selway, August 17, 1934. There we fought to keep from burning up. Here on Granite Creek (see my diary July 18), we were parallel to the right flank of the fire. We were in a grandstand seat with the heavens a livid glow, lighting the adjacent forest so one could read a newspaper at 11:00 p.m.

The roar of the fire was awesome. It sounded like a hundred freight trains coming down a box canyon in the dead of night. I felt like running but didn't. Such a phantasmagoria of sound and color I have never seen. I was spellbound by nature's terrific display.

Now as I look back on my experiences as a fire boss, I would not trade them for the routine of the highest postion in the executive branch of the U.S. government -- the presidency. I hope we never invent a machine to extinguish forest fires. It's a way a young man can get a thrill more wholesome than going to France and leaving behind row upon row of crosses in Flanders Field.